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ABSTRACT

A total career education program (for regular, academically advanced, and special elementary classes) is described and recommendations for program implementation and implications for replication in other settings are presented. It is explained that the program emphasizes such areas as decision making processes, self understanding, basic academic skills, and positive work values and habits. Identified are the following techniques for integrating career education into the academic curriculum: interviews with persons from different career fields; individual research; group discussion; role playing; learning centers; field trips: and career theme bulletin boards. Various components are suggested for successful implementation, including administrative support at all levels, positive teacher attitudes towards career education and towards handicapped students, and definition of personnel roles within the program. (BD)

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Career Education: A District-Wide Program Including Special Needs Students at the Elementary Level

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Career Education: A District-Wide Program Including Special Needs Students at the Elementary Level

The purpose of this article is to focus attention upon career education programming for special needs students in the Jefferson County, Kentucky Public Schools. Following an overview of the total career education program, recommendations for program implementation and implications for replication in other settings will be presented.

Career education as defined by the Jefferson County Public Schools is "the totality of experiences, in school and out of school, at any age, and at any level, which aids individuals in developing a successful and productive career" (Jefferson County Public Schools, 1976-1977, p. 1). Included in the program philosophy is the belief that career education is vital for all students at all levels of development. As a result, the Jefferson County program is district-wide and, compatible with the philosophy of mainstreaming, is designed to involve every child in the district, whether he is in a regular class, an academically advanced class or a special education class. A meaningful and successful career is viewed as a basic need of all persons.

Total Program Overview

Career education encompasses a sequential and developmental program beginning in the elementary years and continuing through the twelfth year of formal education. The curriculum is designed to prepare individuals for a successful and self-satisfying life of

productivity, and is divided into three phases: awareness, exploration and preparation. This article is focused primarily on the awareness phase developed for students of elementary school age.

The elementary program involves a variety of planned experiences for all students and is viewed as the cornerstone of the career education program. The elementary phase provides the foundation for student awareness through the following areas of emphasis:

1. The student's knowledge of the multiplicity of careers found in the world of work is broadened.
2. The process involved in making a decision is emphasized.
3. The understanding of self is explored.
4. The basic academic skills are viewed as relevant for the world of work.
5. Positive work values and work habits are emphasized.
6. The community is viewed as a great classroom providing a variety of resources and learning opportunities.

During the awareness phase, essential background skills and attitudes are developed which will prove useful to the student as he progresses through the remaining phases of the career education curriculum.

Following the awareness phase, the exploration phase occurs during the middle school years. Building upon the awareness developed in the elementary years, career education continues to reinforce the basic skills by showing students, in all of their subject areas, who in the working world uses what they are learning. A greater self-analysis and in-depth exploration of careers is provided to aid the

student in assessing his or her interests, skills and abilities in relation to the work situation.

A formalized program of preparation occurs during the high school years. Skills in communication, computation, career decision-making, job-seeking and acquiring skills as preparation for a career are emphasized. An internship as a non-paid work experience in the career field of the student's choice is available to those students for whom it is appropriate.

Program Implementation

Three tasks were completed prior to implementation of instructional activities in the classroom. First, career education goals and objectives were developed based upon a model provided by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. These goals were further defined in terms of specific learner outcomes for each grade level. Learner outcomes, cognitive as well as affective, were organized sequentially from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The final task was to organize a theme structure to insure awareness of a broad variety of careers. Presented in Figure 1 is the elementary theme structure for the career education program.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

At this point, the career education program must be adapted to suit the needs of exceptional children. The career themes are established for every grade level; however, they can be varied according to the abilities and needs of the students, the curriculum or the skills of the teacher and her desires. The special education teacher is given responsibility to determine the appropriateness of a career theme for her students, the manner in which the theme is to be infused into the curriculum and the pace at which students should proceed.

Implementation of the program begins with the infusion of career concepts into the existing curriculum of the school system. The major emphasis of the elementary curriculum is to develop competencies in the basic academic skills. If career education is to continue as a part of the educational program, it must be blended into the current curriculum as a part of the teaching/learning process.

The blending of career education into the academic curriculum begins with the selection of a basic academic skill to be reinforced. Upon identification of the academic skill, a career theme is chosen, a career education learner outcome is selected and an instructional activity is developed. The instructional activity may take the form of discussion, interview, learning center or any other of a variety of activities. The instructional activity serves a dual purpose in that it reinforces the instructional skill and provides career information for the student. An example of this process could involve recognition of beginning sounds as the basic academic skill to be taught, and the teacher might implement the following sequence:

Select basic academic skill: recognize beginning sounds.

Select career theme: family and neighborhood workers.

Select career education learner outcome: When presented with a picture, the student will match the appropriate job title with the picture.

Instructional sequence of activities:

Teacher presents lesson involving pictures and matching job titles.

Teacher displays one picture at a time.

Teacher presents beginning sound of job title.

Based on beginning sound cue provided by teacher, student supplies appropriate job title for the picture.

The basic skill to be taught, the appropriate career theme, the learner outcome and the instructional sequence will be determined by the teacher based on the individual abilities and needs of the students. The entire process can be coordinated with the development of individual educational plans for special needs students.

Several techniques have proven helpful in integrating career education into the academic curriculum of the Jefferson County Schools.

1. Interviewing is a procedure in which students ask questions of people from different career fields. It is also an excellent means of reinforcing the listening and speaking skills found in the language arts curriculum. The interview can take place in the classroom or, if possible, in an on-the-job setting.

   Special education teachers in the district have suggested that the interview procedure is often unsuccessful if their students

are deficient in the social skills required to conduct a question and answer session. It is for this reason that, whenever possible, special classes should be combined with regular classes when interviews are to be conducted in the school. During the interview process, children in regular classes will hopefully provide an appropriate role model which special needs children can imitate and learn. Courtesy that accompanies listening and speaking should also be stressed in the classroom prior to the interview.

2. Research can be conducted by many special needs students. The amount and mode of research depends upon the individual child. Prior to an interview, it is recommended that the students research the career of the person to be interviewed.
3. Discussion is a group technique that can be used to explore the value of work, attitudes about work and the necessity of good work habits. Discussion usually precedes and follows each interview. As with the interview process, a discussion period presents the opportunity for students to develop and practice the social skills necessary for interpersonal communication.
4. Role playing provides the opportunity for students to act out tasks performed on a given job. It is a relatively sophisticated technique and special needs children will again profit from observing role playing by other children. The special education teacher may want to adapt the role playing technique as appropriate to the needs and abilities of her students.

5. Learning centers can be used to develop specific academic skills or to spark creative interest in careers. Learning centers already are an integral part of many special education classrooms. The most succussful learning centers have been those that were activity-oriented. Activities that have been especially appealing are those in which students can manipulate machinery or instruments. Time clocks, toy cash registers, stop watches, locks and keys, buzzers, bells and audio-visual equipment are usually available to the classroom teacher.

   Another high interest activity involves the use of self-correcting games with a career theme. For example, the student can play the role of a truck dispatcher who must match truck shipments with the scheduled departure times appearing on a game board. The teacher sets the hands of a clock to a particular time, and the student selects the proper truck shipment to depart. The student can determine his own accuracy by comparing his responses to the answers on the back of the game board.

   Other self-correcting activities can involve making change, color coding products, grocery shopping, following recipes and meeting schedules. The possibilities are limited only by the resourcefulness of the teacher.

6. Field trips are an excellent means of gathering information on a first-hand basis. Based on individual abilities, students can observe and possibly interview workers who are fulfilling their work responsibilities in real-life settings.

7. Bulletin boards with a career theme serve to focus attention, stimulate thinking or display work. Student construction of a bulletin board can be used to develop social skills, academic skills and motor coordination.

The District's career education philosophy is that students cannot be adequately prepared for the world of work by remaining constantly in the classroom. Several of the techniques described above are most effective when implemented in actual occupational settings. Field trips and on-the-job interviews greatly enrich the classroom curriculum. As the abilities and interests of the students are considered, the community must be viewed and used as a learning laboratory for all students.

Recommendations and Implications for Replication

The unique feature of the career education program in the Jefferson County Public Schools is its universal applicability to every student in the district, whether handicapped or advanced. While compatible with the general philosophy of mainstreaming and least restrictive alternative, the all-encompassing nature of such a program requires the support of administrators and teachers at all school district levels. No one person can assume total responsibility for the success of the program. Team cooperation is a necessity.

For the requisite team cooperation to occur, several major components must be present in any school district program. The first and most obvious is administrative support at all levels from the central office to the local school. Any program for which there is inadequate funding or support personnel will enjoy only limited success at best.

A second component involves positive teacher attitudes toward career education. Some teachers may not understand what career education is, and may view it only as an addition to the curriculum which they are both unprepared and unwilling to teach. The problem can be remedied by the dissemination of information. Through inservice, teachers can learn what career education is, and that it is not an additional teaching burden. Rather, it is simply the infusion of career concepts into the already existing curriculum.

The third component involves teacher attitudes toward other matters which may have an indirect bearing on career education for exceptional children. The attitude of regular education teachers and their students toward exceptional children could have a detrimental effect on the program. Several of the techniques suggested in this article for integrating career education into the academic curriculum involved the combination of regular and special class students for career instruction purposes. An attitude of understanding and cooperation is essential to insure the greatest possible achievement by the special needs students. Dissemination of information and actual contact should help in removing many of the misconceptions that may be present.

For a school system to successfully implement a career education program, the roles of various personnel need to be defined as members of the team. The superintendent establishes policies which govern the implementation of career education. The central office support staff completes the overall planning for implementation, provides inservice for school personnel and develops programs of community involvement.

The principal provides the leadership, development and coordination of the program in the local school. The classroom teacher implements the program, blending career concepts and career information into the classroom curriculum.

The guidance counselor serves as a resource person in securing materials and community resources. The librarian provides audio-visual resources and reading materials. Community persons representing business, labor and industry serve as resources for developing student awareness of occupations as well as the awareness of the relevancy of basic skills to the world of work. Career education cannot be accomplished unless there is a collaborative effort on the part of all members of the team. Each member shares his or her expertise in providing the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable students to develop to their fullest potential.

Reference

Career education program. Louisville, Ky.: Jefferson County Public Schools, 1976-1977.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Elementary theme structure used in Jefferson County Career Education Program. (From Jefferson County Public Schools, 1976-1977.)

ELEMENTARY THEME STRUCTURE

Grade	Career Theme
Kindergarten	Home, School
1st Grade	Family, Neighborhood
2nd Grade	Personal Services Public Services
3rd Grade	Construction, Transportation Consumer Homemaking, Fine Arts and Humanities
4th Grade	Agriculture, Recreation, Hospitality, Natural Resources, Environmental Control, Communication and Media
5th Grade	Marine Science, Health, Manufacturing, Market and Distribution, Business and Office